

The Washington Post _____
 The New York Times _____
 The Washington Times _____
 The Wall Street Journal _____
 The Christian Science Monitor _____
 New York Daily News _____
 USA Today _____
 The Chicago Tribune _____
L.A. Times A-1
 Date *9 MAY 1991*

Webster, Head of CIA, Will Retire

■ **Government:** The former FBI chief took over the top intelligence post in 1987 after the Iran-Contra scandal. The President has not named a successor.

By ROBIN WRIGHT, TIMES STAFF WRITER

WASHINGTON—President Bush on Wednesday announced the retirement of Director of Central Intelligence William H. Webster, praising the former judge for bringing "an integrity, an effectiveness and an insight to the many intelligence gathering operations of this nation."

At a White House press conference, Webster, 67, said he has "mixed feelings" about ending 26 years of public service to pursue a private law practice. "There's never an easy time to go, especially when you're working for an organization that you believe in and for people that you believe in," he said. The timing of the announcement was linked to Webster's fourth anniversary at the CIA, where he became director on May 28, 1987. Bush has known since March that Webster was planning to leave soon, officials said, and set final details of the departure in a conversation with Webster last Thursday.

The President said the decision was Webster's. "I hate to see him go," Bush said.

The President did not name a successor. Webster will stay on until an appointment is made and during a transition period, Bush Administration sources said.

Robert M. Gates, the President's deputy national security adviser, appears to be the front-runner to succeed Webster, according to one source. Others mentioned as possible candidates for the job include U.S. Ambassador to China James R. Lilley; Deputy CIA Director Richard J. Kerr; Rear Adm. William O. Studeman, who now heads the National Security Agency; and retired Gen. William E. Odom, who formerly headed it.

The retirement of Webster, who took the job after the Iran-Contra scandal had besmirched the CIA, comes at a crucial juncture for the intelligence community as congressional oversight panels debate various proposals for extensively restructuring the nation's top spy agencies.

Although Webster rehabilitated the CIA's reputation for integrity and straightforwardness in government circles, some in the intelligence community see the need for a new leader with a broader foreign affairs background and the vision to improve future intelligence performance.

The CIA has been criticized for not fully anticipating the dramatic events that unfolded over the last two years in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, China, the Philippines and the Persian Gulf. But Webster's supporters within the intelligence community note that he was instrumental in ensuring that reports to Congress and the White House reflected not only mainstream conclusions but dissenting voices from CIA analysts.

Indeed, intelligence officials have almost gloated over the quality and accuracy of intelligence during the Persian Gulf War.

"We all got criticism," the President said. "CIA got a little. Defense Department got a little, we took

CONTINUED

some water over here. But the result was superb and the intelligence was outstanding. The community performed fantastically."

Webster was appointed by President Ronald Reagan following Iran-Contra revelations involving former CIA Director William J. Casey. A former district court and appellate judge, Webster, a Republican, originally had been brought to Washington in 1978 by the Jimmy Carter Administration to become FBI director after revela-

tions about internal abuses in that agency.

"The judge," as Webster is known in Washington, has been acclaimed widely for restoring the public image and internal morale of both agencies.

"He has restored the CIA's respectability and credibility following the helter-skelter tenure of Bill Casey, who used the institution as his own State Department," said Geoffrey Kemp, a former Reagan Administration National Security Council staff member.

Webster also reorganized branches of the intelligence community to deal better with world changes and he improved the often-hostile relations between the CIA and Congress.

"We had in the person of Judge Webster a former federal judge who was a strong and deep believer in the rule of law who, as director, complied not only with the letter of the law but with the spirit of the law as well," said Rep. Anthony C. Beilenson (D-Los Angeles), former chairman of the House Intelligence Committee.

"After our experience with Director Casey, he was just what the doctor ordered," Beilenson said.

During his four years as CIA director, Webster has removed the intelligence community from any major role in policy-making—another stark contrast with previous administrations in which the CIA chief held a Cabinet position and influenced U.S. actions during international crises.

The agency's lower profile contributed to criticism that Webster was ineffectual and that the intelligence community underestimated

the scope or potential of world change. Within the CIA, some officials chafed at what they described as the "judicious slowness" of decisions, particularly on covert programs. Under Webster's tenure, proposals were carefully inspected by a large legal staff to ensure that there was no conflict with U.S. law or international statutes.

In his four years at the CIA, Webster instituted a host of reforms. He strengthened oversight of covert activities, the CIA's most controversial espionage efforts, and organized interagency centers to coordinate counterintelligence functions and narcotics and counterterrorism intelligence.

Webster established a new directorate to oversee strategic planning and strengthened the agency's intelligence-gathering on the Soviet Union, arms control, chemical and nuclear weapons proliferation, technology transfers and world economic competition.

On many of these issues, Webster has lectured across the country and made himself available to the press for background briefings. He has one of the highest public profiles of any recent CIA director—far higher than Bush when he was director during the Gerald R. Ford Administration.

"Webster's felt strongly about speaking to inform the American public about what the agency does and how it does it and to familiarize them with the intelligence process and issues," said one CIA official who requested anonymity.

Webster also developed a new hiring plan to recruit minorities and even established a day-care center to accommodate the increasing number of working mothers at the CIA.

Speaking to the President on Wednesday, Webster said: "I know I'm leaving you a healthy organization, one that has had during the last four years a good track record for its accountability. We have positioned ourselves for the challenges of the '90s, which are different from the challenges of the '80s."

CONTINUED

House and Senate oversight committees have begun hearings on a variety of proposals to restructure the nation's intelligence activities. They include a plan to appoint a director of national intelligence to directly oversee all intelligence-gathering outlets, from the CIA and the FBI to customs and the Treasury.